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Multiage education

Abstract

This paper is a review of literature relative to the practice of multiage education. The introduction consists of the background of multiage grouping, and centers on the one-room school house from centuries ago. Also, the theoretical framework is investigated to further explain the background of multiage grouping. A broad explanation of multiage is given, along with characteristics of a multiage program.

Benefits and disadvantages of multiage grouping are discussed in later chapters. Suggestions for successful implementation of a multiage program are also shared. The conclusion of the paper consists of a summary of the research and recommendations for further research.

MULTIAGE EDUCATION

A Graduate Project

Submitted to the

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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by

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a review of literature relative to the practice of multiage education. The focus of the paper is to look at different components of multiage grouping in the educational system.

The introduction of the paper consists of the background of multiage grouping and centers on the one- room school house from centuries ago. Also, the theoretical framework is investigated to further explain the background of multiage grouping. A broad explanation of multiage is given, along with characteristics of a multiage program.

Benefits and disadvantages of multiage grouping are discussed in later chapters. Suggestions for successful implementation of a multiage program are also shared. The conclusion of the paper consists of a summary of the research and recommendations for further research in the area of multiage education.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, the educational system has endured continuous change. At times these changes have mirrored practices from the past, and have appeared again under new names. Multiage grouping is an example of a concept that has come full circle in education. It had its roots in one room schoolhouses which represent the beginning of education in our society in the 1600's (Daniel & Terry, 1995).

Historical Background

Early Multiage Schools

Centuries ago the one- room schools look nothing like schools of today. Teachers were scarce; schools were expensive, and students' attendance was irregular. Several factors affected students' attendance. The weather was one of these factors. Some children had to travel many miles to get to the school. Another reason for sparse attendance was the perceived importance of schooling in those days. Students were expected to do work at home, and this requirement was of greater importance than attending school (Bacharach, 1995).

The one- room schoolhouses provided a community atmosphere where students worked and learned together, as did their families and neighbors (Grant, Johnson, & Richardson, 1995). In these early multiage schools, students sat on hard benches and

worked from hornbooks, slates and tablets. Schools were usually housed in small buildings that sometimes doubled as churches. A large cast iron stove was often used for heat. One of the older boys would tend to it. Schools enrolled anywhere from 10-30 students ranging in age from six to 14 years (Bacharach, 1995). A solitary teacher taught individuals, and small groups when they were at the same level. If a teacher was busy with another child, a more capable student was expected to help other children with their learning. The curriculum emphasized rote memorization and drill practices. Students were grouped by their capabilities, regardless of their age. As students progressed, they would advance to the next level. Grouping had little to do with philosophies of teaching, for it was a result of convenience and economic constraints (Daniel & Terry, 1995).

The Graded Schools Developed

As time went on, there were several reasons that caused the public to move away from the one room school as the main form of education. One reason for the change was introduced by Horace Mann, a 19th century educational leader and the Secretary to the Board of Education of Massachusetts. In the early 1800's, Mann was a charismatic leader who attempted to discover ways to better education in our country. In 1843, he went to visit schools in Germany where he viewed *gradedness*. In supporting graded schools, Mann stated that "the element of superiority consists of proper classification of scholars." (Bacharach, 1995, p. 6). His ideas consisted of training teachers and preparing them to teach children who are classified by age in graded classes. (Daniel & Terry, 1995).

A second reason for the steering away from one room schools was the publication of graded materials and curricular texts. In 1836, the McGuffey Eclectic Readers were published. This was a reading series of five readers which increased in difficulty. Other texts followed in the various subjects and started to set norms for the different grade levels (Bacharach, 1995).

In 1848, the Quincy Grammar School was founded in Boston, and it incorporated a new organizational method that grouped students by age. Students were grouped by grade and either retained or promoted at the year's end. This was another factor that led to the deterioration of the one room school. This design was adopted primarily by schools in cities.

A fourth reason for the decline of the one room schoolhouse was caused by the industrial revolution in the 1840's. There was increased urbanization and immigration into the United States. There became a need for more public education. As the population grew, and people migrated toward city life, there became a greater demand for schools away from the rural setting (Grant, Johnson, & Richardson, 1995).

A Return to Multiage Grouping

There were, however, some attempts to move away from the graded model in the 20th century. John Dewey started a Laboratory School in Chicago and eliminated constraints of age groups. Much later, the open education movement in the 1960's attempted to

combine team teaching, Individually Guided Instruction (IGE), and multiage grouping.

These attempts and innovations were not widely replicated at the time (Bacharach, 1995).

Today, many schools are once again returning to the design of multiage grouping. However, ungraded units today do not closely resemble the earlier one room school house versions of multiage education, and many researchers believe the new multiage grouping has a better chance of succeeding. Today, "multiage education, when thoughtfully planned, can allow children of various ability and age levels to work and learn in an environment where they can be successful at their own developmental levels" (Daniel & Terry, 1995, p. 8). Time is one element that can be altered in an educational setting. Not all students are on the same learning *schedule* to master a set curriculum. If students are given more than one year to develop and achieve the skills that are expected of them, students will be more successful in school.

While children develop at varied rates, our traditional method of grading is inflexible and requires students to be tied to certain time restraints. The multiage classroom allows children additional time to develop. This revisited concept resembles the process in the one room school house where an assignment was given to students of varying levels, was evaluated at many levels, but accomplished by all.

Theories Behind Multiage Grouping

Multiage grouping is rooted in and built from a number of theoretical and philosophical frameworks. Awareness of these theories gave a broader picture of what multiage education is based upon. Multiage education is based on five theories: a

cognitive theory, a sociocultural theory, a social learning theory, a psychosocial theory, and an ecological theory (Bacharach, 1995).

The first theory was developed by Piaget and is called the Cognitive Theory. Piaget argued that peer interaction advances a student's cognitive development. He observed that when children interact, they *decenter* their thinking. "Decentering is the capacity to understand one's own thinking and at the same time the thinking of others." (McClellan, 1994, p. 1). Also, Piaget wrote that a diversity of ages is crucial in ensuring a mix of viewpoints. (McClellan, 1994). He hypothesized that children must actively interact with their environment to construct their own knowledge. The social environment is also important in this theory. Piaget believed that learning was a developmental process. He would find merit in a program that individualized curriculum according to a child's developmental level. This process is consistently incorporated in multiage settings (Berk & Winsler, 1995).

Lev Vygotsky introduced a second theory which relates to multiage grouping. The Sociocultural Theory focuses on the social aspects of learning and the various interactions provided by the individual's culture. Vygotsky wrote that there are different developmental levels at which children learn. At one level, children can do things on their own, while at another level they need guidance (Dever, Zila, & Manzano, 1994). The zone of proximal development was defined by Vygotsky to "describe the distance between the actual level of development as determined by independent problem solving and the level as determined by independent problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Bacharach, 1995, p. 10). Peers in a multiage

classroom can facilitate development by assisting other children in moving to the next level of understanding (Berk & Winsler, 1995).

The third theory supporting multiage education is the Social Learning Theory. Bandura, a social learning theorist, saw development as a product of social learning through observations and imitating others. Development is based on continuous interaction between individuals and their environment. Multiage classrooms provide many opportunities for younger children to imitate older children's behavior and learn from various observations (Bacharach, 1995).

The Psychosocial theory is based on the works of Erik Erikson. It is the fourth theory tied to multiage education. In this theory, individuals face a series of psychosocial challenges in their development. Success or failure at these challenges are determined by different relationships and interactions in society. From early to middle childhood, children deal with the following conflicts: autonomy vs. shame and doubt, initiative vs. guilt, and industry vs. inferiority. A multiage classroom offers assistance in solving the conflicts at these stages through positive social interactions (Erikson, 1950).

The final theory upon which multiage grouping is based upon is the Ecological Theory. Bronfenbrenner is the theorist who believes that the environment is a large network of interrelationships. Development is a result of these relationships. What children bring into the classroom in terms of their abilities, interests, cultural values, and beliefs will be unique and valued in the classroom. These differences are accepted in a multiage classroom because this diversity more closely resembles the real world (Bronfenbrenner, 1989).

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to review and analyze the literature concerning the role of multiage classrooms in early childhood education today. In order to achieve this purpose, the following questions will be addressed:

1. What is multiage education?
2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of this type of organization?
3. How can an effective multiage program be implemented?

Need for the Study

Today, there has been a renewed interest in multiage education for several reasons. It is crucial that we provide the best education possible for our children. In order to gain knowledge and unbiased information on how to meet this goal, it is important to review the literature to determine if multiage grouping is a way to help students to be more successful in their education.

Multiage grouping introduces a way of curbing grade retention. Many studies have been done on the negative effects of students who have been retained. For example, in their book, *Flunking Grades: Research and Policies on Retention*, Shepard and Smith (1990) explain some of the negative effects of retention on children (Anderson & Pavan, 1993). One, retained children may perform more poorly when they are promoted to the next grade than if they had not been retained at all. Two, the dropout rate for students who are retained in two grades is 100%. The third negative effect of retention came from

research conducted by Yamamoto (1989) who studied childhood stressors and found that children who were being retained in school felt more stress than if they had wet in class or had been caught stealing (Anderson & Pavan, 1990). Because of the emotional impact that retention has on children, it is vital to study the alternatives to flunking students.

Children develop at different rates and in different ways. For some, this development comes at the *regular* time. For others, development takes longer. The traditional way of grading students is inflexible. Each student has a set time to understand the designated concepts at a certain grade. Because we are aware of the negative aspects of retention it would be beneficial to investigate the option of multiage education. This form of grouping recognizes and celebrates diversity. Multiage grouping argues that we should do away with a system driven by birthdates rather than ability. It understands and provides educational opportunities for children who are at different rates of progress (Anderson & Pavan, 1993).

Another reason for reviewing the literature of multiage education is based on the social aspects of our society today. Technological advances, increased mobility, alternative family structure, and growing ethnic populations are all part of the complex world in which we live (Miletta, 1996).

A solid educational base is important amidst all of this complexity. Today's school children come from diverse backgrounds. Students vary by race, family, structure, ability, and experiences. "It is this complexity, rather than any philosophy that warrants and should motivate educational systems to accommodate students who are reflecting the diversity of society" (Goodlad & Anderson, 1987, p. 25). Multiage grouping respects diversity and values different perspectives. In examining multiage education, Cushman

(1990) urged that, "By creating a model that expects diversity rather than uniformity among kids, many of the problems in a single grade class lose their destructive grip over teachers and students both" (Cushman, p. 30). The schools must accept the uniqueness of each child and find a way to offer diverse learning opportunities.

Today, school reforms are focusing on the importance of the early years. In her article, "A Look at Multiage Classrooms," Deborah Cohen quotes Vito Peronne who is the director of the teacher education program at Harvard University by writing,

"There has been a growing need to provide children with a very strong base... out of which they can move confidently. People are asking how to ensure that the early years are not a failure. One way is to think about the primary years as a developmental period where some children will move more rapidly than others" (Cohen, 1990, p.22).

Many schools have gradually changed to multiage education. Increasing understanding of the developmental process of education has caused state legislatures to mandate multiage classrooms for grades K-3 in Kentucky, Mississippi, and Oregon (Lodish, 1992). In Seattle, at least 20 of 64 elementary schools have turned to multiage grouping (Houtz, 1996).

Limitations of the Study

During the investigation into multiage education, some limitations have surfaced. One, is the limited access to publications on the subject. Another is that the publications that were available are not all recent literature.

Definition of Terms

Authentic Assessment- an assessment of what the teacher actually wants students to understand. It occurs in the context of normal classrooms and reflects the actual learning experiences. Portfolios, journals, observations, and conferences are ways teachers assess. Tasks are open ended and judgment is required to evaluate the level of performance.

Cooperative Learning- instructional method in which students are heterogeneously grouped to produce academic and social gains. Students are individually accountable for their learning, yet also experience a sense of interdependency for success in their group.

Developmentally Appropriate Practice- curriculum and instructional strategies that are individualized and child centered.

Ecological Theory- theory supporting the idea that development is a result of inter-relationships of an individual with the family, community, society, and the world.

Heterogeneous Grouping- the random grouping of students so that groups represent a variety of abilities, gender, race, etc.

Homogeneous Grouping- grouping of students who are similar by some trait.

Literature Based Instruction- strategy for teaching reading using literature as the foundation. The language arts components and content areas are taught around a particular book of literature.

Multiage Grouping- the placement of students of differing chronological ages with the same teacher for more than one year.

Nongradedness- term used to describe schools, classes, curricula without the concern

for the grades a child is in school, such as 1st, 2nd, or 3rd.

Peer Tutoring- Students assisting other students in grasping a concept.

Portfolio- a collection of artifacts documenting a student's progress.

Psychosocial Theory- theory supporting the idea that success/failure of individuals dealing with a series of psychological and social challenges is determined by the individual's relationships and by demands placed on them by society.

Social Learning- a theory supporting the idea that development is the product of observation, imitation, and identification of others.

Sociocultural Theory- similar to the social learning theory. It stresses the importance of understanding the expectations tools, skills, and interactions provided by a child's culture.

Team Teaching- two or more teachers who plan, teach, support each other with common and agreed upon roles and responsibilities.

Thematic Teaching- the use of a central theme around which all subjects are taught

Summary

Throughout history, our educational system has endured continuous change. Multiage education is an example that has come full circle. It had its roots in the one room schoolhouses of the 1600's. Students ranged in age from six to fourteen years, and one solitary teacher would be responsible for all. The children were taught by their capabilities rather than by their age.

There were many reasons behind the progression toward graded public education in the United States: the influence of Horrace Mann, publishing of graded textbooks,

opening the Quincy Grammar School in Boston, and increased immigration during the Industrial Revolution.

Five philosophical theories help to paint a better picture of the framework of multiage education. The theories are: a cognitive theory, a sociocultural theory, a social learning theory, a psychosocial theory, and an ecological theory.

There are several reasons for the renewed interest in multiage education today. Curbing grade retention, social aspects of society, and the acceptance that children develop at different rates are all factors that contribute to the need for this literature review of multiage education.

CHAPTER 2

EXPLANATION OF MULTIAGE GROUPING

Children have always been grouped in multiage and multiability settings outside of the schools environment: in sports, play, extra curricular activities, on the school bus, and in the home. However, our educational system insists upon teaching children in a curriculum divided into steps labeled by specific grade designations. In the handbook entitled, *Nongraded Primary* (1992), Lilian Katz is quoted as saying, "Although humans are not usually born into litters, we seem to insist they be educated in them" (p. 5).

Now our educational system is moving toward a structure that is compatible with the real world. This structure is called multiage grouping. This structure allows children an education which is developmentally appropriate and permits them to progress at their own rate without being hampered by labels related to grades, retention, or ability. By definition, multiage grouping is the placement of children of varying ages, grades, and ability levels in the same classroom with the aim of improving learning for all (Gaustad, 1996, p. 1). Multiage grouping enables a child to stay with the same teacher, in the same classroom for more than one year. Multiage grouping should not be confused with combination classes in which two or more age groups are combined for administrative reasons, like overcrowding or decreased enrollment at a grade level. Multiage classes are grouped for perceived benefits to children and their education, not out of necessity (Lodish, 1992). The reason for using multiage grouping is to provide an organizational environment which is responsible for the following: (1) allowing teachers to understand each child at an individual level, (2) utilizing knowledge about how children learn to

achieve success, (3) expanding learning opportunities through social interactions, (4) developing conceptual thinking and problem solving skills, (5) supporting children to become independent learners (Anonymous, 1994).

Characteristics of a Multiage Classroom

There are certain characteristics which are commonly found in multiage classrooms. These characteristics can be grouped into four different areas: beliefs, curriculum, assessment, and parent involvement.

Beliefs on multiage education

The first area to examine is the beliefs behind multiage education. In our traditional method of grouping, we expect children of similar ages to be at the same mental, social, and intellectual ability and level. The premise of multiage education is to value diversity. The focus is on the individual and meeting his or her needs regardless of how diverse they are (Bacharach, 1995).

Another belief in multiage schools is that learning is hands on, child centered, and activity based. Students construct their own knowledge through continuous interaction with their environment. Each child's construction is personal and unique. No two students learn information and skills in the exact same way (American Association of School Administrators [AASA], 1992).

Another premise concerning the belief of multiage grouping is that learning is a social process. As children converse with others, they expand their learning and thinking. Children can learn more about communication when given opportunities to share their

learning with others in a variety of forms (AASA, 1992). This premise coincides with the philosophy of Lev Vygotsky and the Social Learning Theory.

Curricular Components of Multiage Grouping

There are several curricular elements that are common in multiage classrooms.

Learning centers, thematic units, literature based reading, manipulatives, team teaching, and cooperative learning are the commonalities focused on in this study.

Not only do children bring different levels of experience into the classroom, but they also are different in their learning styles. Howard Garner's book, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (1985), explains that children learn differently. They show their intelligence through physical movement, music, interpersonal relationships, intrapersonal awareness, linguistic ability, scientific thinking, and spatial coordination. Teachers in multiage settings tend to allow children to express themselves according to their various learning styles. They are able to do this through the use of learning centers (Daniel & Terry, 1995).

Learning centers are "collections of activities and materials ranging from the concrete to the abstract" (Bacharach, 1994, p. 35). They are vital to a classroom structure that intends to individualize instruction and allow students control over their learning.

Students use centers to learn and reinforce concepts. Learning centers meet the needs of the various learning styles in classrooms today. They provide the learner opportunity to interact in an active, hands-on activity (Creative Teachers' Press [CTP], 1996). Learning centers need to nurture childrens' inquisitive nature and experiential learning opportunities. Learning centers must provide manipulatives, creative objects, open ended

activities, and are often used parallel to thematic teaching (Grant, Johnson, & Richardson, 1995).

Thematic teaching is the second curricular component to multiage classrooms. In this strategy for integrating the curriculum, the teacher “chooses a central theme that is the focus throughout the various content areas during a school day” (Bacharach, 1995, p.24). For example, if the theme is oceans, the children would be learning about whales throughout their day. They may measure a whale for math, learn migration of whales in science, read stories about whales and what they are used for in social studies, and write stories or poems about whales for their language arts. Children are allowed to explore a specific topic in detail. Theme teaching allows children to learn a common topic, yet allows them to work at their appropriate level.

Process writing and literature based reading are the center of the language arts programs of many multiage classrooms. Process writing focuses on the the process of writing, instead of the final product. It allows for various levels and interests. Children may be at different stages in their writing. The first stage all students start at is drawing pictures to represent an idea. The second stage is scribble writing, where no visible letters are made. Random strings of letters are seen at the next stage in which a writer progresses. Next is the inventive spelling stage, in which children use the phonetic sounds they hear to begin to spell words. The final stage is the conventional spelling stage that requires that words are spelled correctly (Walters, 1995). In a multiage classroom, children may be writing on the same topic, but each student is working at his or her own level.

Math manipulatives are commonly seen in multiage schools. They are “concrete materials and activities with which students interact to understand math concepts” Skills such as sorting, classifying, grouping, and problem solving are developed by the use of these manipulatives. (Dever, Zila, & Manzano, 1994, p. 22). Collaboration and sharing are also incorporated in the math programs. There are three strategies which are used frequently in multiage classrooms to teach math. The first is modeling, students with more experience often model their knowledge for others. The second strategy is tutoring. Peer tutoring is used throughout the multiage curriculum, but works well in the math setting. Children who have not yet mastered a subject can be assisted by those who have. Pairing and sharing is the final strategy. Some multiage classrooms make a daily practice of sharing student created math problems in pairs (Dever, 1994).

The next curricular component is team teaching. Teaming is used because it provides support for teachers and increases their creativity making the curriculum richer (CTP, 1996). Team teaching allows children to interact with more than one adult. It also permits one member of the team to be able to step back and observe the children and to make more accurate assessments.

The last component, cooperative learning, is critical to the success of a multiage classroom. The benefits to this strategy are seen academically and socially. Leadership, communication, and conflict management skills are learned from cooperative learning. These interpersonal skills have short and long term effects. Short term effects include “greater learning, more subject retention, and critical thinking. Long term outcomes include greater employability and career success” (Grant, Johnson, & Richardson, 1995, p. 9).

Assessment in a Multiage Classroom

Traditionally, schools use competitive and comparative evaluation techniques. This method utilizes standardized tests which stress a final product. Formalized testing requires that children conform and does not celebrate diversity. Due to the wide range of abilities in a multiage classroom the teacher must assess differently. The teacher must be aware of the individual progress in five areas: social, emotional, physical, cognitive, and aesthetic. First, the program's objectives and outcomes need to be defined. Assessment must be done, with objectives in mind, at an individual level (Daniel & Terry, 1995).

Assessment is defined as "the process of observing, recording, and documenting the work that children do and how they do it, as the basis for educational decisions that affect those children" (Daniel & Terry, 1995, p. 29). Assessment in a multiage room is ongoing, child-centered, and emphasizes students' strengths.

Many different forms of assessments are used in multiage schools. Teacher observations are used extensively. Teachers must have an organized system for their record keeping. The keys to good observations are objectivity and documentation. Teachers must keep accurate records which remain free from bias (Ornstein, 1993).

Other forms of assessment, which utilize teacher observations, are anecdotal records. These are brief, positive narratives of a child's progress in school (Daniel & Terry, 1995). Work samples which students complete are taken and used to record a child's progress. Checklists are often used in observations relating to a behavior, skill, or instructional objective (Stiggins, 1997).

The final assessment for this discussion on multiage classrooms is the use of the portfolio. In his book, *Student Centered Classroom Assessment* (1997), Richard J.

Stiggins defines portfolios as,

“a purposeful collection of students’ work that tells a story of the students’ efforts, progress, or achievements. This collection must include student participation in selection of portfolio content; guidelines for selection of that material; criteria for judging the merit of the collected work; and evidence of students’ self reflection” (p. 449).

Stiggins also lists some advantages for using portfolios in the classrooms. Some of the reasons why portfolios have become so popular are the following: (1) to track students’ achievement, or lack thereof, (2) to show the detailed process of achievement and progression which a child goes through, (3) to allow students to take responsibility for their achievement, (4) to help students learn to reflect on their own work, (5) to provide an insight into students’ academic self-concept, (6) to help students to understand work production requirements for real life situations, (7) to allow students to practice reasoning and analyzing skills (Stiggins, 1996, p. 24).

Parent Involvement

One of the keys to a multiage classroom is enhanced communication between school and home. The parent has the opportunity to establish a strong relationship with the child’s teacher over several years. It is important that children know that both environments are supportive of them in their learning. “Parents are the most important people in a child’s life. Their love, affection, support, and approval are a fundamental need of all children. Research shows that when parents are involved at school, students benefit” (Canter, 1991, p. 3).

In his book entitled, *Parents on Your Side*, Lee Canter wrote about several studies focusing on parent involvement. The findings in this area include:

- * A 1986 study by the Department of Education concluded that families are critical to success in school, and that “curriculum of the home is twice as predictive of academic learning as family socioeconomic status.”
- * Urie Bronfenbrenner studied a number of educational intervention programs. He concluded that active involvement and support of the family are critical to a child’s success in school.
- * Gigliotti and Brookober studied schools and found parent participation to be a factor in a school’s effectiveness.
- * Joyce Epstein studied teachers who sought parent involvement, she found positive changes in students’ achievement, attitudes, and behavior.
- * Ann T. Henderson summarized the results of 50 articles and found that parent involvement helped students perform better. She also reported that schools that involve the community have students that out perform other schools. Lastly, she observed that children whose parents help them at home and are in touch with the school, score higher than other children with the same aptitude. (Canter, 1991, p. 4).

In the book, *Multiage Classrooms*, several suggestions are given to promote parent involvement in the classroom. Parent education meetings are very beneficial and help parents to form a sense of community in the classroom. These meetings allow parents to get a better understanding of classroom activities and routines. It is a time when parents can congregate together for discussions on the curriculum, to share questions and

concerns about their child's education, to give feedback on the program, and to discuss future changes. Professional speakers are frequently invited to these meetings to give lectures and to help parents understand topics such as assessment, reading strategies, and invented spelling. These speakers can often give presentations on parenting skills (CTP, 1995).

Parent volunteers are a way to get parents involved in the classrooms and are utilized in many ways. They may assist the teacher by working with small groups, teach a mini-lesson, share a special talent, or assist with computer use and typing. Volunteers may also organize fund raisers, serve as room parent, attend field trips, and assist with room maintenance (CTP, 1995).

In the book, The Nongraded Primary (1992), Lynn Goya, a parent on a multiage task force, makes a powerful statement. "Perhaps nothing is more essential to a child's education than the increased awareness and participation of the family and community" (p.9). Parents need to be involved in their child's education at all levels.

Summary

By definition, multiage is the placement of children of various ages, grades, and ability levels in the same classroom for more than one year, with the aim of improving learning for all.

There are certain characteristics which are common to multiage classrooms. These characteristics are grouped into four different areas: beliefs, curriculum, assessment, and parent involvement. Beliefs consistent with multiage teaching include valuing diversity, child centered learning, and learning as a social process. The curricular components of

multiage classrooms are: learning centers, thematic units, literature based reading, manipulatives, team teaching, and cooperative learning. Assessment in multiage classrooms need to focus on the individual as a whole. Parent involvement is crucial to the success of any multiage program.

CHAPTER 3

BENEFITS OF MULTIAGE GROUPING

Numerous studies have been done in the past decade on multiage education. There are many positive aspects for both teachers and students when schools implement mixed-age grouping.

Benefits for Children

Prosocial Behavior

One of the advantages of multiage education, which is consistent in the research, is the positive prosocial behavior of students. An investigation completed by McClellan and Kensey (1994) found that multiage classrooms indeed encourage positive behavior and relationships in children. Prosocial behaviors focused on in the study included: nurturing, caring, sharing, and others. The conclusion of the study viewed multiage classrooms as an atmosphere where children were included in more positive friendship opportunities and higher levels of prosocial behaviors (McClellan and Kinsey, 1996).

In a study by Bacharach and Hasslen, 1994, teachers were interviewed and questioned on their perceptions of student characteristics in a multiage setting. The teachers in the study spoke positively about the students' sensitivity and tolerance of others, ability to work with others, leadership qualities, role modeling, and verbal interactions (Bacharach, 1994).

In a synthesis of 27 studies on multiage education by Pratt, the conclusion was made that mixed age grouping produces an increase in nurturance and prosocial behavior (Mackay & Johnson). In a similar study Miller, who reviewed over 20 multiage

classrooms stated, “ In terms of affective measures... multigrade students out-perform their single grade counterparts at a statistically significant level”(Gomulchuk & Piland, 1995, p 29).

Multiage education emphasizes building upon a student's strengths, which builds self esteem. It also focuses on the whole child, his/her gift for social interaction or artistic impression is also valued (Grant, Johnson, & Richardson, 1995). Students' self esteem was rated as consistently positive because the children were not threatened by competition and were allowed to work at their own rate. Children feel better about school as they meet academic goals and engage in meaningful personal relationships. Students begin the second school year with confidence due to their familiarity with the setting, teacher, and their peers.

Lack of Aggression

Another benefit to multiage grouping is the lack of competition and aggression in the students. Discipline problems naturally decrease when students are happy and experience success in school. The absence of competition and the focus on cooperation are reasons multiage classes have fewer discipline problems (Grant, Johnson, & Richardson, 1995). Discipline problems diminish when students are with the same teacher for more than a year, know the classroom routine, experience consistency, are placed with role models, and experience cooperative activities in a mixed age setting (1995). In *Cooperative Discipline* (1989), Linda Albert talks about the three C's of encouragement: Helping children feel capable, connected, and contributing. One

question that concerns parents and teachers is: Will the younger children be bullied by the older students? In reviewing the research on this topic, the opposite is more true.

“Children in multiage groups may be less likely to be bullied or to bully others”

(McClellen, 1996, p. 2). In reality, the concentration of same age peers gives way to a higher incident of aggressive, antisocial, and destructive acts (McClellan, 1996). In a study by Whiting and Whiting (1975) it was found that children were more aggressive with agetates than with younger or older students..

Whiting and Edwards (1977) distinguished between aggressive and dominant behaviors. They found older students did dominate younger peers but were very nurturing to them. Pure aggression, including rough and tumble play, teasing, and insulting was seen in same age groups. An explanation was given for this behavior by Goodall (1986). He found that established hierarchies reduce fighting and aggression, and that “A primary factor is the establishment of hierarchies in adult male primates is age” (p.2). Confrontations are more frequent when individuals in a social group are the same age and physical size. Since establishing dominance is more difficult with agetates higher levels of competition occur.

Social benefits in multiage classes are seen and cooperation is enhanced when, “Younger children assign to older children instructive, leadership, and sympathizing roles. Older children assign younger students the need for help and instruction” (Katz, 1995, p. 2). These mutual perceptions create a cooperative climate. The lack of aggression coupled with the increase in cooperation reduces behavior problems in the multiage classrooms (CTP, 1996).

Special Needs Children

Multiage grouping creates a classroom climate where individual differences are respected and expected. Children with special needs have a better opportunity for successful integration (Clark, 1996). In addition to the feeling of belonging, the special needs child, as well as other students, benefit from three different forms of instruction. Preteaching, which involves practicing, rehearsing, and repetition facilitates learning. Cross age tutoring allows for social and academic growth. The Project Approach, Lilian Katz's idea of "guiding children to choose for project work a phenomenon, object, or event that is readily available in children's immediate environment and with which children have first hand experience" (p.1).

In another study by Bailey, Burchinal, and McWilliam (1993) students with disabilities show more significant gains when placed in a mixed age group. Behavioral role models, varying activities, and hands-on learning are provided. They also benefit from having the same teacher for more than one year.

Academic Benefits

In examining the academic performance of children in a multiage setting the results "clearly support the multiage class as a viable, effective organizational alternative to single grade classes" (Gomolchuk & Piland, 1995, p. 29). Professor Barbara Pavan reviewed 64 studies on multiage schools. She found that "58% of students in multiage classrooms performed better than peers on academic achievement" (Matten & Yates, 1995, p. 1).

Older children benefit from the tutoring they do with the younger students. Research shows that when older students teach information to the younger ones, their academic

performance and even IQ scores dramatically improve. “The research of Arthur Whimbey showed that when students were allowed opportunity to tutor someone their IQ assessments improved as much as 18 points” (Matten & Yates, 1995, p. 1).

As a child interacts with children at different levels of cognitive maturity, intellectual growth is stimulated. In a mixed age group, younger children are able to engage in higher level thinking, with the assistance of the older students (Katz, 1995). Lev Vygotsky, who introduced the sociocultural theory, believed that collaboration is a factor in social development. The zone of proximal development is the most well known of Vygotsky’s ideas. The zone of proximal development in short is the “level which students can solve problems with support. This support being social interactions, questioning and modeling by more mature peers or adults” (Berk & Winsler, 1995, p. 48). In a multiage group students learn to be self motivating independent learners who work together to acquire decision making and problem solving skills (CTP, 1996).

In a mixed age group the tendency for whole group instruction is reduced. Due to the varying abilities and levels, teachers organize curriculum so children can work in small groups and at different rates (Lodish, 1992). In these small groups much of the interaction is taken up with student talk. “Higher rates of engaged, directed, student talk is correlated with achievement gains” (Grant, Johnson, Richardson, 1995, p.48).

Assessment

Formalized and standardized testing is commonly seen in traditional classrooms settings, for this testing philosophy assumes everyone should master the same skill at the

same time. In multiage education, alternative forms of assessment are used that “encourage students accountability and accommodate legitimate societal and parental needs for feedback on student progress” (McClellan, 1994, p. 1). In the article, *Assessment in multiage classrooms*, McClellan focuses on the ideas of W. Edwards Deming. Deming was the American businessman who turned around the Japanese economy after WWII. His ideas have also had an impact on American business and schools. Deming wrote that “practices such as evaluation of performance, merit ratings, or annual reviews are deadly diseases/obstacles to the creation of an environment which encourages high quality work” (McClellan, 1994, p4). Deming’s suggestions can be related to assessment practices in education. These suggestions are the following:

- * Drive out fear so everyone can work effectively
- * The job of management (or teaching) isn’t management, but leadership
- * Break down organizational barriers
- * Cease depending on mass inspection (and testing)
- * Build quality into the design stage (the process of learning)

William Glasser is another supporter for alternative assessments. In his book, The Quality School: Managing Schools Without Coercion, Glasser (1990) wrote that students are motivated when they are given a chance to learn under conditions that aren’t limited to time constraints. Examples of assessments in a Quality School are: self evaluations, projects, writings, interviews, practicing, and demonstrating.

Teacher Benefits

Rapport

In addition to the many benefits multiage education has for students, there are also advantages for teachers. In the study of teacher perceptions by Bacharach and Hasslen in 1994, teachers were found to be very appreciative of the opportunity to build rapport with students, parents, and colleagues (Bacharach, 1994). Due to the fact that students remain with the same teacher for more than one year, teachers are better able to view and understand the child as a whole and implement better ways to educate them. Teachers are able to assess a student's growth and progress when they work with the same child over a longer period of time (CTP,1996). Teachers can use knowledge about a child from one year to another to help plan for learning experiences for the following year. Multiage grouping eliminates the get acquainted time at the beginning of the year and allows learning to begin sooner.

Teachers also expressed an increased rapport with parents. Because parents are actively involved in the classrooms for more than one year, the communication becomes better. In a study by Byrnes, Shuster, and Jones, the research concludes that "children who liked the multiage classroom tended to have parents who also rated it positively"(Katz, 1996, p.20).

Teachers can also work more closely and build cooperative team relationships with colleagues. This team work is different from the traditional settings where the faculty is usually isolated within their individual classrooms (Bacharach, 1995). More individual time is given to students when volunteers and teacher associates are utilized in multiage classrooms.

Teacher Attitude

Teachers who currently implement mixed age groups view them in the following way: joyful and enthusiastic. "Multiage groups add richness and empowerment for teachers. Rather than a threat, it's an opportunity for freedom" (AASA, 1992, p. 4). Teachers are allowed time not only for classroom preparation, but to work with colleagues on the school's vision (AASA, 1992).

In a multiage setting teachers change from being a transmitter of knowledge to a more active role as facilitator. Marsha McCoy, a multiage teacher, stated that "I really feel that the motivation in a classroom stems from the teacher's enthusiasm. The students are going to model the attitude they see. The students gain self- motivation"(AASA, p.15).

Summary

There are numerous benefits to multiage grouping for both students and teachers. For students, studies show positive effects in prosocial behavior and an increase in self esteem. The student's sensitivity and tolerance for others is increased, leadership and nurturing qualities are also improved. Another benefit for students is the lack of aggression and increase in cooperation seen in multiage classrooms. Special need students are accepted and discipline problems decline. Various studies also indicate that there are academic benefits to the multiage approach.

Teacher benefits are also seen in multiage programs. They have an increased opportunity to build positive rapport with students, colleagues, and parents over time.

Teacher attitudes about their jobs are more positive, they feel better about being a facilitator of learning.

CHAPTER 4

DISADVANTAGES TO MULTIAGE GROUPING

With every change in curriculum education, potential risks as well as advantages merit consideration. Multiage grouping holds many benefits, but it also carries with it some valid concerns.

Older Students

The concern with multiage grouping which is reported most often is that older children will not be challenged in a classroom with younger students. Critics of multiage classes worry that teachers will step back and allow the older students to teach the younger ones all of the time. In any classroom, it is a potential risk for the higher ability children to become bored and unchallenged. Even in graded settings, there is a ceiling effect, “an upper limit on content for a given grade, imposed by graded curriculum” (Grant, Johnson, & Richardson, 1995, p. 47). In a well functioning multiage classroom students are looked at developmentally, which offers a higher “ceiling”. Teachers must take responsibility to provide enriching and challenging materials, and to monitor each child’s progress (Katz, 1996).

There is also the problem of older children becoming bossy and overbearing; this concern has been voiced by opponents of multiage, but the consensus of the many studies reviewed do not indicate that this is a problem in multiage classrooms.

Younger Students

There are also some disadvantages for the younger students. They may feel “overwhelmed and intimidated by their larger more experienced classmates” (Katz, 1996, p. 1). Some younger students, especially if they are very competitive may become frustrated by the gap in abilities between their work and the older students (Lodish, 1992). Another negative aspect to multiage grouping is that younger students may become “acutely aware of their own limitations compared to the others” (Katz, 1996, p.1).

Marturano in 1987, studied dyadic contacts in a classroom setting. These contacts observed on tape and classified according to initiators and receivers. The results show that only the younger boys in a multiage classroom were affected by the age combinations. They were talked to the least by all of the other groups. Other results indicated that older children preferred to interact with agemates, and younger students also preferred to talk to older students more (Marturano, 1987).

Teachers and Curriculum Materials

Even though multiage education has many positive aspects for teachers, it also carries with it some disadvantages and concerns.

One of the main concerns that teachers have is the lack of curriculum geared toward non-graded approaches. Textbooks are manufactured for grade levels and they “nurture conformity and tempt teachers to cover material whether it is appropriate to the individual differences among pupils” (Cohen, 1990, p. 22). The small number of curricular materials restrict learning opportunities in multiage classrooms. Some critics question whether curriculum development has advanced enough to support multiage settings. Also, people

have raised the idea that national goals and uniform testing programs will eventually work against multiage education (Cohen, 1990).

Teacher training and teacher resources are issues of great importance to multiage education. "Little, if any, specific training is undertaken by teachers of multiage classes" (Gomulchuk, 1995, p. 2).

In a study by Gomulchuk and Pilland, teachers were surveyed about aspects in multiage education. One of the findings from the study indicated that there is a great need for teacher resources, such as math manipulatives, literature, and preplanned integrated theme plans (1995).

Other disadvantages to multiage groupings include: teacher workloads are higher, more planning time is needed, increased aide support is necessary, and positive staff support is needed. Some of these things may not be possible to implement in a school because of lack of funding.

In a study by Brown and Martin, thirty- four principals and teachers were given questionnaires, all of which had experiences in a multiage setting. "80% preferred teaching in a single grade class, 17% had no preference, and 3% preferred multiage classes" (1989, p.13). A similar study by Bacharach and Hasslen, (1994), indicated that teachers believed the greatest disadvantage to multiaging in a primary setting was the lack of sufficient staff. They also believed there was a large developmental gap between children in the primary grades (Bacharach).

The final disadvantage is the difficulty of teacher tension. Sometimes innovative efforts by a small group of teachers in a building can split the staff into "pro and con

subgroups” (Gaustad, 1995, p. 2). Also, because of the higher levels of work and planning to blend curriculum, teachers tend to burnout (Gaustad, 1995).

Special Needs Students

Another drawback to multiage education may be the danger of a teacher delaying the referral of a special needs child. The organization of multiage deemphasizes grade level barriers. Teachers view students’ continuous progress. Without levels marked by grades, teachers may overlook a child with potential disabilities (Grant, Johnson, & Richardson, 1995).

Summary

There are many advantages to multiage grouping, but there are also some disadvantages. One concern is that older children could not be challenged enough and become bored. Another concern is that younger children may feel intimidated and aware of their own limitations. The lack of curricular materials for multiage classrooms is a major disadvantage. Other problems with multiage programs include increased workloads for teachers, increase in planning time, and lack of teacher aides for these classrooms.

CHAPTER 5

IMPLEMENTING MULTIAGE GROUPS

Multiage grouping is being implemented with increased frequency in schools across the nation. Implementation of this innovation must be planned carefully and knowledgeably. There are essential steps to take in the transition from a traditional classroom to a multiage classroom. The first step is to agree on a broad vision of the multiage program. Funding must also be discussed prior to any implementation steps. When a school is ready to move towards a multiage setting, the following aspects must be considered: changing roles of teachers and principals, implementing team building and teaching, holding on site visits, checking the physical environment, and reviewing time and money issues.

Teachers

In any multiage school, the roles of the staff need to change. Teachers in a traditional classroom are usually primary sources of information. They dictate facts and follow up with worksheets and activities. In a multiage classroom teachers need to become facilitators by “helping children access information and acquire process problem solving skills” (Bacharach, 1995, p. 13). Teachers need to modify curriculum to meet the needs of each individual student. They need to continually correspond with parents and work closely with their colleagues.

To meet the needs of multiage students, “teachers need in-depth knowledge of child development and a large repertoire of instructional strategies” (Gaustad, 1995, p. 2).

Teachers also must have knowledge about when to use homogeneous and heterogeneous grouping and be capable of organizing cooperative group lessons (Gaustad, 1995). Good multiage teachers must view children as whole beings. Assessment is woven into their teaching. They use a variety of teaching styles to tap into all of the abilities in their room (Grant, Johnson, & Richardson, 1995).

Teacher Training

Teacher training is very important to the success of a multiage classroom. For many teachers “unlearning held notions about how children learn is essential to implementing multiage grouping” (Gaustad, 1995, p. 2). In a survey given by Opuni and Koonce, teachers identified different kinds of support they believe to be necessary for multiage groups. They reported they would be interested in kindergarten through second grade content area instruction, child development, alternative assessment, whole language, hands on science and math, developmentally appropriate practices, and special needs children (McClellan, 1995).

Teachers must know how to plan and work cooperatively with colleagues, and be able to explain program practices to parents and the community. “Research has found that understanding and support of the nongraded programs by teachers and parents are the factors most crucial to the program’s success” (AASA, 1992, p. 13). Many parents have their own school memories which consist of structured grades and activities. They naturally may assume that the way they were taught is the way their child should learn. “Building a bridge of mutual trust and understanding is critical” for home and schools who wish to start a multiage program (AASA, 1992, p. 15). Frequently when innovations are

tried without communication with the home, parents raise objections. However, if parents are informed and are given an opportunity to ask questions, they seldom pose difficulty.

“Parents who are truly concerned about their child’s education are usually more than willing to accept any endeavors that may improve their education” (Stahney, 1970, p. 21).

Principals

The principal is central to school improvement. Strong administrative support is essential to promote a new program. “It is not effective for a principal to mandate philosophical changes” (Bacharach, 1995, p. 47). He or she certainly may encourage change, but the movement is more successful when it is teacher driven (Houtz, 1996). As teachers transition to multiage grouping, an administrator can be supportive by buffering the impact of negative parents and staff.

In addition to the multiage organization and developmentally appropriate practices, a principal also needs to have knowledge of the change process. “Innovations often fail because policy makers give teachers insufficient time, training, and psychological support” (Gaustad, 1995, p.1). Effectively implementing a multiage program requires several years, and a principal needs to be fully aware of this.

Principals need to support teachers and maintain a sense of community in the school. Facilitating an innovation such as multiage grouping “requires leadership and interpersonal skills, as well as, patience and empathy” (Gaustad, 1995, p. 3). In 1990, in a study of elementary principals, results showed there was a preference to abolish traditional grades. Two thirds of the principals interviewed believed that abolishing the graded first five years of school would be advantageous (AASA, 1992).

Team Building

When implementing a multiage program it is important to have a healthy work environment, where teachers encourage and support one another. "Real teaming takes place when ALL members of a team, support each other in ways that establish a need satisfying environment" (Bacharach, 1995, p. 48).

Curriculum is richer when teachers can pool ideas and collaborate. Team teaching also allows students to interact with more than one adult. "Teaming permits long term relationships of children with teachers, while also allowing a variety of adults to be involved" (Grant, Johnson, & Richardson, 1995, p. 61). It helps with assessment by allowing one teacher to really observe and form a more comprehensive view of the child.

To encourage positive feedback and interactions of teachers, more staff resources are needed because the teacher work load has increased.(McClellan, 1995). Teacher associates and parent volunteers are very important to the success of multiage programs.

Visiting Other Sites

Teachers who are attempting to change to a multiage classroom need the opportunity to interact and discuss questions with others who are already teaching in multiage schools. This interaction is achieved by numerous visits to already existing multiage sites. Teachers should also be allowed to attend various professional workshops and conferences. By visiting other schools which are implementing multiage classes and attending workshops, teachers gain a broader view and clarify questions they may have pertaining to multiage. During these visits, it is imperative that teachers are allowed dialogue time to ask questions (CTP, 1996).

The Physical Environment

Considering the school's physical environment is an important step in implementing multiage grouping. The layout of the classroom should offer whole group gathering areas, seat work areas, areas to relax and share, and secluded areas. Multiage grouping can have many different physical arrangements. An open environment, a classroom without walls or movable partitions, is conducive to a learning centers and cooperative groups. The open environment creates a good environment for team teaching (Bacharach, 1995).

Closed classrooms are the traditional classroom with walls, but they can also be used for multiage grouping. These teachers either have the same multiage students all day or they move from room to room with different mixes of students. It is important to remove excess furniture so children have room to interact (Bacharach, 1995).

Time and Money

"Sufficient time and money are essential ingredients in creating and maintaining the multiage classroom" (Gaustad, 1993, p. 3). Multiage takes years to master, and staff development can be expensive. Money is spent through providing a variety of curricular materials, hiring substitutes for conferences, workshops, and planning time with colleagues, and the hiring of teacher aides (CTP, 1996).

Implementation of new programs requires an understanding of the process change, planning, and patience. Research on successful innovations indicate that change efforts take three years or longer to become part of the everyday school life (McClennan, 1995).

Obstacles to a Multiage Classroom

A school must go through many changes when moving to a multiage setting. With all changes in school restructuring, pitfalls or obstacles can arise. In their book Grant, Johnson, and Richardson (1995) list twelve things that could complicate the transition to a multiage classroom (p94):

1. Insufficient planning
2. Starting for the wrong reasons
3. Forcing staff into the program
4. Lack of knowledge about change
5. Divisions among change
6. Poor class composition
7. Poor parent communication
8. Poor communication with community
9. Curriculum that is mismatched to multiage
10. Insufficient preservice skills
11. Insufficient inservice and administrative support
12. Inappropriate evaluation and assessment strategies

Summary

More and more classrooms today are turning to multiage education. Implementation takes time and money, and should be planned very carefully. Certain steps must be taken to ensure success. Funding must first be decided upon and a vision for the program established. Teachers and principals need to change their roles in the schools. Teachers

must modify curriculum and teaching styles. Teacher training is essential for multiage programs. Principals have to be supportive and knowledgeable of the implementation process.

It is important for teachers to have the opportunity to visit other schools that are implementing multiage programs. The physical aspect of the environment must also be considered. There are many obstacles that could arise during implementation that professionals should be made aware.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The purpose of this study was to review and analyze the literature concerning the role of multiage education in early childhood classrooms today. To achieve this purpose three questions were considered in the review of literature:

1. What is multiage grouping?
2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of this type of program?
3. How can an effective multiage program be implemented?

By carefully analyzing the literature available on multiage education, these questions were answered in the following way:

What is multiage grouping? Multiage education is a concept which had its roots in the one room school house from the 1600's. In these schools a solitary teacher taught students varying in ages and abilities. Children were grouped by their capabilities rather than their age.

By definition, multiage grouping is the placement of children of varying ages, grades, and ability levels in the same classroom with the aim of improving learning for all. Some of the curricular components of multiage grouping are learning centers, thematic units, literature based reading, manipulatives, team teaching, and cooperative learning. Assessment is completed by on going observations and anecdotal records. Parent involvement is critical to the success of a multiage program. They can be involved in many different ways from parent meetings to parent volunteers.

What are the advantages of multiage education? There are a number of benefits to multiage education. Socially, students develop a sense of caring and nurturing as they help each other learn. When students build learning upon their strengths, their self-esteem is enhanced. When children learn at different rates, competition is decreased, and discipline problems are seen less.

Academically, as children interact with classmates at different levels of cognitive maturity, intellectual growth is stimulated. Students learn to be self-motivating and independent learners who acquire decision making and problem solving skills.

Teacher benefits include positive rapport with students and parents, a more accurate assessment opportunity for each child, increased opportunity for team teaching.

What are the disadvantages to multiage education? One main concern about multiage settings is the older and more talented students may not be sufficiently challenged. Critics also question if younger children will be babied and intimidated by the older children. Disadvantages to teachers included more work, lack of curriculum and materials, absence of administrative support, and lack of teacher training.

How do you implement a quality multiage program? Implementing a multiage school requires sufficient time and planning. There are essential steps that need to be followed when restructuring toward multiage classrooms. These steps include: establishing a vision, changing teachers' and administrators' roles, study literature and attend conferences, visit sites, plan physical environment, staff training and reviewing time and money issues.

Conclusions

From reviewing and analyzing the literature I have made the following conclusions:

1. Multitage classrooms had their roots in the one room schoolhouses from our country's history.

2. There are many philosophical theories that support multitage education.

Awareness of these theories give a broader picture of what multitage is all about. The following theories lay the framework for multitage grouping: Cognitive theory, Sociocultural theory, Social Learning theory, Psychosocial theory, and the Ecological theory.

3. There are certain characteristics of multitage schools and these components are necessary to provide a quality multitage program. These components can be grouped into different areas: beliefs, curriculum, assessment, and parent involvement.

4. Benefits of multitage education are seen socially, and academically.

5. Some disadvantages have been voiced in multitage education.

6. Implementation needs sufficient time and planning. Background information is necessary and on-site visits serve as a resource for multitage. Parent involvement is a critical component to multitage grouping.

Recommendations

After reviewing the research on multitage schools I would make the following recommendations:

First, I would advise any school interested in multitage education to review the literature on the subject. It is important to know the historical background and

philosophical theories which support multiage grouping. I would also suggest for staff and administration to attend workshops or conferences to gain knowledge on multiage groups. Understanding the rationale behind multiage grouping is critical before initiating the implementation of a new program. Finances need to be reviewed to understand how the program will be funded. It is also imperative that the teachers are not forced into a multiage setting by the administration. It is critical for the teacher to demonstrate a high level of commitment and belief in this type of classroom organization.

A second recommendation would be to hold parent informational meetings to gain parental support. It is important for them to know the goals of the program and what instructional strategies will be used to teach their children. One way to involve parents is to make them a part of the process of implementing multiage: let them be involved in the decision making, allow them to go on multiage classroom visits. Once the program has started keep the parents involved on a regular basis through meetings, newsletters, and encourage parent volunteers.

A third recommendation to a beginning multiage teacher is to be aware that there is a lack of curricular material available. Most text books are designed for a classroom structured by grade levels, so teachers in a multiage setting must be prepared to spend extra time planning developmentally appropriate thematically based activities. Teachers could seek planning money from the district to work in the summer to develop the curriculum.

A fourth recommendation deals with assessment. Because activities are more individualized, assessment must follow suit. Teachers need to let go of ABC report cards

and focus on the whole child. Observations, record keeping, anecdotal records and portfolios must all be used to accurately assess each child.

The fifth recommendation stems from the concern people have with multiage education. Teachers must take responsibility to provide enriching and challenging activities to the older or more gifted students in the room, and to monitor their progress.

Being aware of the obstacles which may impede changing to a multiage classroom is very important. A supportive environment of colleagues, parents, administration, and community is essential.

Multiage Education is a reform that has gained renewed interest in today's educational systems. As society changes, it is important to create educational reforms that coincide with the changing families and children. In a quote from the Nongraded Primary, (p12)

“Steps are being taken to better prepare children for schools, we must also better prepare schools for children. This is especially important for young children. Schools must be able to educate children effectively when they arrive at the schoolhouse door, regardless of variation in students' capacities, interests, and learning styles.”

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